



Singing in Schools – A summary of the available guidance

Executive Summary

Singing can take place subject to the mitigations set out in the guidance from DfE for Schools referencing DCMS guidance for rehearsing and performing groups and DfE guidance for after-school clubs and similar activities. The key areas to manage are distancing at 2m+ for all taking part and to consider the ventilation in the space being used. Group sizes will need to be appropriate for the mitigation required and large choirs are unlikely to be possible unless space and ventilation permits.

Key points (please see the detailed guidance links for more information):

DfE Guidance for Schools relating to Singing [schools guidance](#)

- Singing can take place in line with the guidance for schools and that from the DCMS for professional and non-professional artists.
- Further research is being undertaken to understand the cumulative aerosol risk for singing activities and how risks might be reduced further.
- You should take particular care in singing to observe social distancing and this may limit the numbers able to take part in such group activities. The established practices for minimising the number of contacts between pupils or pupils and staff should be in place subject to the balance needed to offer a broad curriculum.
- It is safest if singing groups are formed within existing bubbles of pupils in school. Smaller group of singers may be necessary to meet distancing requirements.
- Under the guidance for after-school clubs (see below) it is also possible to have a consistent group of singers from across different bubbles as an extra-curricular activity as long as the appropriate mitigations are in place and the group attendance is known and tracked.
- If feasible, singing outdoors will provide for a reduced risk taking account of distancing and wind effect.
- If indoors then use as large a space as possible for singing, ideally with high ceilings and sufficient ventilation for the size of group (see below). Ventilation should be extraction air-flow not re-circulatory air conditioning.
- Singing should not take place in large groups such as choirs or assemblies unless a high level of ventilation can be achieved (10 litres per second per person).

- In smaller groups, distance of 2m should be in place between singers and singers and group leaders unless additional mitigation is used. Pupils should be side by side when singing.
- Encourage quiet singing and keep backing tracks at a level that does not encourage loud vocal production. Microphones can be used but are difficult to sanitise therefore it is recommended that only the group leader should use a mic in order not to have to raise their voice in a large space or above singing.
- If using sheet music, individuals should have and keep their own copy. Copying will in most cases be permissible under the Schools' Printed Music Licence scheme.
- Individual vocal study lessons can take place with the appropriate mitigations with teachers.
- If performances are planned please note the DCMS guidance on performances.

DCMS guidance relating to singing [DCMS \(Department for Culture Media and Sport\) guidance](#)

- Venues operating COVID-19 secure guidelines can have gatherings of more than 30 people as long as mitigation and risk processes are followed. Bear in mind that individual groups within an attending audience/event participation should still operate within 2 households or mixed group of 6 if outside and not interact with other groups and this has to be managed.
- If planning a performance a specific risk assessment should be in place that takes account of the factors in the detailed guidance (link above).
- Steps should be taken to avoid audiences having to unduly raise their voices to limit aerosol distribution (e.g. chanting, singing along)
- Groups that are singing in a rehearsal or performance will need to be socially distanced at 2m+. Closer mitigations are not permitted for non-professionals.
- Cleaning of performance venues will be needed paying particular attention to surfaces that may be touched.

Guidance for after-school clubs, holiday clubs and out of school settings relating to singing [out of school hours guidance](#)

- This guidance does apply to schools that operate before or after-school club or extra-curricular activities.
- Group sizes should be determine based on the current distancing guidance, the ability of children to maintain it, manage hygiene practices and their age, the nature of the activity and the space being used. It is strongly advised that groups should be no larger than 15.
- Groups should be consistent, especially if different to normal school day bubbles, records kept regarding participation and avoid interaction with other groups in operation at the same time.

- Specific guidance in relation to singing is the same as that for schools and performing arts above.

Additional background relating to singing

Recent commissioned research (PERFORM and SOBADRA) provides a context for understanding and confidence however the research to date has been focused on **adults** and it is recognised that further understanding in relation to the voices of children and young people is needed. There is a further paper on singing commissioned by Music Mark/Sing Up available at <https://www.musicmark.org.uk/news/back-to-school-back-to-singing/>.

- There is a high confidence that droplets from singing (that fall rapidly on to a surface and is mitigated by social distancing in particular) are similar in amount to that from speaking over the same length of time dependent on level of loudness.
- There is high confidence that larger droplets over 5 microns (which can carry micro-organisms) from singing and speaking do not spread beyond 2 metres.
- There is high confidence that different individuals have different levels of spread of droplets.
- Breathing, speaking and singing all produce aerosols (small particles that stay in the air, mitigated by social distancing as distance affects density and by ventilation)
- There is high confidence that breathing and normal speaking produce similar amounts of aerosols.
- There is medium confidence that singing which can produce more aerosols than breathing or speaking have a similar level to breathing or speaking if it occurs at a low or moderate loudness level. There is high confidence that loud singing produces significantly more aerosols similar to shouting.
- There is high confidence that some individuals (2 in 25 in the PERFORM research) produce a level of aerosol from breathing as those singing loudly.
- The research conclusions suggest that:
 - There is a high confidence that extending social distancing for singing beyond 2m to prevent droplet spread is unnecessary and there is a remote chance of droplet spread beyond that distance.
 - The impact of greater distancing to prevent aerosol spread is not known and is most likely to be dependent on airflow and ventilation in a space.
 - Singing at loud levels will require significantly more ventilation than quiet singing and this has to be considered in terms of spaces in relation to rehearsals and performances in addition to audience ventilation.
 - Singing should take place in large spaces if possible with smaller groups and ideally ventilation in excess of 10 litres per second per person needs to be achieved, the higher the better, in order to reduce the likelihood of transmission.

- Outdoor singing, especially if fully open, makes transmission highly unlikely including under a gazebo without sides. Fitting sides to a gazebo makes it the same as singing indoors.

Ventilation Information

As noted the guidance on ventilation requirements for singing (and other music) activities is still being researched however there is an expectation that for singing, higher levels of ventilation will be required if there is a higher level of volume and therefore aerosol production. It is recommended also that such spaces are ventilated between activities to further reduce risk.

In considering the suitability of spaces in schools for particular types of activities, schools may wish to note the responses received in relation to ventilation from the local authority's M&E Engineer within the Property team.

Air conditioning

If spaces have air conditioning this is likely to be in relation to heating or cooling the room, not extraction. Natural ventilation via windows or doors external to fresh air can be used (see below). If mechanical air management is available, changes will be required to the system to enable it to operate on full fresh air rather than recirculation and this would require the maintenance contractor to be contacted to determine any adjustments.

Natural ventilation

Achieving sufficient natural ventilation is dependent on many factors:

- Number of people in the space
- The size of any opening windows/external doors
- Position of windows/external doors including height
- Speed of wind
- Thermal bouoyancy
- Room size
- Draughts with open windows/doors
- The type of activity taking place, in a music context taking particular care with vocal, brass and wind studies)

A simple rule of thumb approach for considering types of ventilation that might be suitable for different spaces would be:

1. Single sided ventilation, where the airflow relies on openings on one side of the enclosed space and air entering from one window leaves from the same or another opening. E.g. a large window can let in air which ventilates out of a smaller window for example a fanlight. This is effective as ventilation only if the distance from the openings to the other side (the depth) is no more than 2.5 x the ceiling height.

In addition the window openings should be at least 5-10% of the floor area. So a room with a 2m by 2m floor area e.g. 4 sq m would need natural ventilation openings of between 20-40 sq cm.

By way of example a music practice room with a 2.5m ceiling height could have a maximum depth of 6.25m for this type of ventilation to be effective as long as the window openings are of sufficient size.

Classrooms and School Halls will vary in ceiling height so a calculation would be required to determine if single sided ventilation would be effective.

If it is felt that ventilation needs to be enhanced, desk fans can be placed at the further point from the openings to assist with removing stagnant air.

2. Cross ventilation creates an airflow between openings on opposite sides of a space entering from a windward opening and leaving from a leeward opening on the opposite side, collecting heat and any polluted air as it travels. Again multiple parameters will determine how much air is ventilated in this way.

For this to be effective the depth from the windows should be no more than 5 x the ceiling height and the window opening is 1% of the floor area on either side (2% in total).

For example, a school hall with a ceiling height of 6 m could have a depth of up to 30m from the windward openings with this type of ventilation as long as the openings are sufficient in size.

3. Stack ventilation operates through thermal buoyancy with the warm air rising to escape from higher openings with cooler air entering at a lower level as long as there is a difference of 1 degree C between outside and inside temperature.

The heat removed depends on the height difference between the two openings and is most common in atriums or rooms with high level windows.

The effectiveness is across a width of 5 times the difference in the height.

In example a small room with a high window and a low inlet the difference might have a height difference of 1.5m and an effectiveness across 7.5m width.

An atrium could have a height difference of 10m and an effectiveness across 50m width.